

Make it an Earth-Friendly Holiday Season!

From Thanksgiving to New Year's Day household waste increases more than 25 percent, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. Make it a green holiday season, and think before you shop, wrap, decorate and throw parties!

That's a Wrap

- Gift wrapping comprises much of the increased waste during the holiday season. Get creative and use newspaper, maps, posters, coloring book pages, or fabric remnants you may have lying around the house. If purchasing wrapping paper, buy recycled paper, and avoid the foil or metallic kind, as it is not recyclable.
- Instead of purchasing boxes and gift bags that are used once, try to using things like baskets, old tins, hat boxes, cloth bags, or even brown paper bags that you decorate.
- You can use scarves or bandanas as tissue paper, or buy some beautiful wash clothes or towels and make them part of the gift.
- For ribbon, use yarn or twine, or make your own with dried vines or slivers of a palm frond. Decorate your package with leaves or flowers you find in your garden.
- Save the front of all your holiday cards each year, and use them as your gift tags.

Gifts for a Good Earth

- Consider useful gifts that will not end up in the attic or in the back closet. The best way to accomplish this is by asking family and friends to make a wish list of things they need or would enjoy having.
- Give gifts that benefit the environment, like fair trade goods, a compost bin, a bird feeder, a membership to an environmental organization, or items made from recycled or organic materials. Include a card that highlights what is special about your gift, so you pass on the knowledge as well.
- Consider gifts without packaging such as certificates for massages, a day of sailing, or fly fishing lessons. You can make your own gift certificate for a special dinner, pet sitting, house cleaning, gardening, or any other gift of time or talent you have to offer.
- If giving electronics, consider buying rechargeable batteries and a charger to add to the gift. Rechargeable batteries can last hundreds of hours longer than single use batteries.

Trimming the Tree

- Choose LED lights for the tree and keep the lights on only when you're there to enjoy them.
- Trees can be recycled to create mulch by placing them roadside ... just be sure to remove all the tinsel, garland and any other foreign objects (consider using less tinsel or an alternative to save yourself time later).

Thoughtful Feasting

- Don't throw that food away, instead have some extra plastic containers and send leftovers home with guests or donate to a local food bank.
- Avoid paper plates, plastic cups and especially Styrofoam disposables, by using washable plates and linens for your holiday parties and meals.
- Recycle extra aluminum foil and cans that come with holiday feasts.

The Party's Over

- After all the presents are opened, consider passing on your old toys, electronics, clothes and other items to non-profit resale stores, or use E-bay, Freecycle, or Craig's List to find them a new home.
- If you're unable to pass on your cell phones or other electronics, make sure that you bring them to St. Lucie County's Recycling Facility (see http://www.stlucieco.gov/solid_waste/index.htm). DO NOT throw them in your regular trash as they contain hazardous materials that need to be handled separately to avoid air, soil, or ground water contamination.
- Save your boxes, bows, and cards for next year and do your part to extend the life of our natural resources.
- Be sure to collect and recycle your cardboard and wrapping paper (only the non-metallic kind). Send any packing nuts or materials to packing and mailing companies for re-use.

Be an Earth-friendly pet owner

1. Beware of Exotic Pets

There are at least 133 species of exotic fish and wildlife in the state of Florida. Many of these non-native animals, including pythons and iguanas, are here because they were released by pet owners when they became too large or expensive keep. Not only is it illegal to release non-native species, it is harmful to the natural environment as exotic species compete with natives for resources and some become top predators.

Think twice before purchasing an exotic pet and do your homework. Exotic pets can be hard work. Make sure that you have the resources to care for that cute little critter when it reaches full size. For example some pythons can grow to be over 10 feet long! If you unable to care for your exotic pet, do not release it into the wild instead try these options:

- Contact a pet store for possible returns
- Give or trade with another hobbyist or pet owner
- Donate to a local school, zoo/ sanctuary, wildlife rehabbers or to animal-related clubs such as 4-H or the St. Lucie Regional Herpetological Society (<http://www.stlucieherps.net/>)
- Check <http://www.myfwc.com/> for pet amnesty days

2. Adopt & License Lassie

Thousands of animals arrive at the St. Lucie County Humane Society every year. You can help by adopting an animal instead of buying from a pet store. Also, protect your pets by ensuring that they are registered and licensed. Both St. Lucie County and the City of Port St. Lucie require that animals are registered so that they can be returned to the owner if they are lost.

Do you still have your heart set on a pure breed? Seek out a rescue organization, many of which are breed-specific. There are several that maintain relationships with animal shelters so they can find permanent homes for popular breeds. Before adopting, be sure to research possible genetic problems that may be common to the breed you are seeking.

3. Be part of the Solution!

Over five thousand unwanted, unhealthy or untreatable animals were euthanized in St. Lucie County from 2006-2007 (<http://www.hsslc.org/statistics.html>). Be a part of the solution by spaying or neutering your pet. This will significantly reduce the cost to register or license your pet with the County. You can also give your pet a longer, healthier life and lessen the chance of harmful medical problems such as certain types of cancer. Call the Humane Society for low-cost or no-cost spaying and neutering options.

4. Organic and/or Holistic Pet Supply Options

Today there are many options for organic and holistic foods for pets. If possible, pass up supermarket foods, which are often made from poor quality meats and have a lot of additives. Instead opt for organic foods made from meat raised or grown in a sustainable way. Or look for holistic foods with ingredients that meet human food quality standards. Be sure to read the product labels for more information.

5. Keep Cats Healthy & Indoors

You can possibly increase your cat's lifespan by years if you keep them indoors. Also, local native wildlife will thank you! House cats are a top predator and kill off thousands of birds and other small animal species each year.

While indoors, consider switching to an environmentally-friendly litter. There are many options available, including those made from biodegradable or recycled products. The alternative choices are often easier to dispose of and contribute to the overall health of your cat and the environment.

Remember keeping yourself informed will keep your furry, feathered or scaly friends happy and healthy!

6. Be Flea Free the Green Way!

Use pine needles, lemon oil, dried sage, fennel, rye or rosemary on or in your pet's bed to help repel fleas and ticks.

Adopt a Low Carbon Diet for the Planet

1. Eat LESS beef, pork and lamb

Beef's carbon footprint is 3 to 7 times larger than chicken's. In addition, production of one pound of beef uses up to 29 times more water than a pound of chicken and 50 times more than a pound of soybeans. Commit to having at least one meatless meal a week, and think about a 'less meat' diet overall.

2. Drink less 'bottled' water

Producing the bottles for US consumption of bottled water for one year requires the equivalent of more than 17 million barrels of oil AND it takes 3 liters of water to produce 1 liter of bottled water. Use a reusable container to bottle your own tap water and eliminate the 2.5 million tons of carbon dioxide that is generated from US consumption of bottled water.

3. Choose Food Less Travelled

Most American meals contain ingredients from at least five countries with an average of 1,500 miles of travel for most of the food on the American dinner table!! Buying from your local farmer's market is your best bet at choosing food 'less travelled,' but you can also look at labels to try to choose food that is more local.

4. Know Your Fish before You Eat It

High-tech fishing practices are depleting fish stocks, endangering entire species and damaging habitats, and some farm-raised fish have been found to contain high levels of PCBs and dioxins. Know which fish are struggling for survival and look for sustainably managed fish before buying. Check out the Monterey Bay Aquarium's list of sustainable seafood at <http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/seafoodwatch.aspx>

5. Eat Fruits and Vegetables that are in Season

Fresh fruits sold in the winter are often imported from faraway places or grown in greenhouses, both of which produce a large carbon footprint. Importing food by air has a carbon footprint 6 times larger than transporting by ground. Therefore, choose fruits and vegetables that are in season, and as local as possible ... it's better for your health and the planet!! (Adapted from www.goodguide.com)

Creating Cooperative Communities

1. Cooperative Cooking

Start a cooperative cooking group with a few friends, and save money, save time, and commit to buying greener foods. In cooperative cooking, each member cooks a meal that will feed all the families of the group (obviously, the group can't be too large, depending on the size of the families). You package it up for the other families and refrigerate. The next day, you make the exchange, getting enough food to feed your family different meals ... and with leftovers, it can mean no additional cooking for the rest of the week.

Cooperative cooking saves you money, because you can buy in bulk and are only buying the items you need for that one meal. It also helps you avoid the temptation of fast foods or going out to eat too often, because it adds variety to your menu.

Best of all, cooperative cooking lets you share traditional or special meals with friends and saves you time during the week that you can spend enjoying your family!

2. Carpool for the Environment

Share your ride to work, school, shopping, and other travel to save money and reduce the amount of pollution going into the local and global environment. Sharing a ride can often be a great way to build friendships, and it also means you have to drive less often. If you don't have someone in mind, check out the South Florida Ride Share program sponsored by the Florida Department of Transportation by visiting <http://www.1800234ride.com/>.

3. Community Gardening

Consider planting a small garden as part of your home's landscape. Keep it close to the house for ease, and start with herbs and your favorite fruit or vegetable. You'll be surprised how fun it is and the savings you'll gain from growing it yourself.

You can also start a community garden that's shared with your neighbors. The St. Lucie County Cooperative Extension Service has a community garden that you can visit and see how it's done. They may also be able to team you up with a Master Gardener to give you some tips to be successful. Visit <http://stlucie.ifas.ufl.edu/> or call (772) 462-1660.

Don't forget, if having your own garden doesn't interest you, then visit the Farmer's Market and purchase locally grown fruits and vegetables. You'll reduce your food's travel distance and invest in a local business!

4. The Great Exchange

Engaged, connected communities help people get through tough times. Get to know your neighbors and start planning ways you may be able to help each other. Plan a neighborhood garage sale where you can have a clothing or furniture swap. Who knows, you could create a whole new look for your living room without spending a dime!

Home improvements can go a lot faster if you can create a work group that takes turns working on each other's homes. Take an inventory of the skills your neighbors or friends possess and come up with a plan on which project to start. Be sure to use toxic-free products for your renovations.

Go beyond home improvements by swapping your time and expertise. For example, you may have no idea how to do home repairs, but are an excellent cook, or great with computers, or perhaps you can teach music or yoga or mentor a child. You don't even have to have a great skill. For example, you can run errands for someone in need.

It's Not a Waste

1. How do I love Renewable Energy? Let me count the ways...

One dollar, two dollars... Stay informed on public and private incentives that pay back some of the costs of making your home or business more energy efficient. For example, the federal government provides tax incentives that will reimburse homeowners up to 10 percent for energy efficient home repairs and even more for investments in renewable energy such as wind and solar. Check out <http://www.energytaxincentives.org/>.

2. Roses are red, smoothies are green.

A study by the University of Arizona found that most people waste 15 percent of the food they buy. You can save money and minimize waste by turning overripe fruits (and even veggies!) into yummy and healthy smoothies. Combine other leftovers into soups and sauces or have a left over night and challenge the family to empty the fridge!

3. If I could save time in a bottle...

It would not be a plastic one! While convenient, plastic containers are made from non-renewable products and most end up in the landfill. In addition, studies have shown that toxic chemicals can leach into foods heated in plastic containers. To be safe and eco-friendly, use glass or lead-free ceramic containers to heat food and make sure food is completely cooled before storing in plastic.

4. If life were but a dream, my love...

Dare to dream of a healthy and sustainable lifestyle and make it happen little by little. Start with three achievable goals like generating less trash, lowering your energy bill, and conserving water. Document and celebrate all your efforts and achievements. Once you catch the "green" bug you will not be able to shake it!

Top 5 New Year's Resolutions

Your health and the health of the planet are intertwined. Resolving to make a few simple changes may help you meet your goals and take care of the Earth at the same time.

1. Get Healthy!

Contribute to improved air quality by ditching the car and walking or riding your bike to the store or park. Fuel your body with locally or organically grown produce and reduce carbon emissions and pesticides.

2. Reduce Debt!

Lower electric bills by unplugging electronics when not in use and you will conserve energy. Follow the buy now, pay now policy and avoid purchasing the latest fads on impulse. Buy food in bulk when possible.

3. Get Organized!

Make a resolution to REMEMBER to bring your green bag into the store with you. Take time to designate a recycling area to make it easier for all your family members to separate garbage from paper, plastic, and glass. Stop junk mail by visiting <http://www.donotmail.org/> and reduce clutter by donating unused items to thrift stores or <http://www.freecycle.com/>.

4. Learn Something New!

Attend one of the many green events around town, like the green market every Saturday in Fort Pierce. Visit the library or community center to find information on workshops and lectures offered by county, state, and university organizations.

5. Spend More time with Family and Friends

Turn off the TV and get outside for some quality time with friends and family. Start a community or backyard garden, landscape with native plants, or volunteer at a local nature facility.

30 Quick Tips for Going Green

1. Mulch Sustainably.

Using mulch in your garden and landscape is an excellent way to reduce runoff and retain moisture where your plants can utilize it. However, you should be choosy about the mulch you buy. The best choice is to buy 'recycled' mulch or mulch that is created as a byproduct of milling. Avoid using cypress mulch completely unless you are sure it was sustainably grown and harvested. Cypress trees are an important part of Florida wetlands and can help attenuate hurricane force winds. At one time cypress mulch was created as a byproduct of fences, shingles and siding. But today, nearly half of the estimated 42 million cubic feet of cypress trees cut down every year in Florida is used solely to produce mulch.

2. Join the Green Team in the Workplace.

Conserving energy and resources isn't just something you can do at home. These same goals and principles can be implemented in your place of business. Take the lead and start a green team in your workplace. Just like at home, change to energy-efficient light bulbs, start a recycling campaign, turn off the lights in rooms that aren't being used, and ask that non-toxic products be used for cleaning and renovating your office.

3. Reduce Your Carbon Footprint!

Before you buy, know where the item was manufactured. If it was made on the other side of the planet, large amounts of carbon were emitted into the atmosphere on its way to you. Try to find a comparable product made in Florida or the United States. It will help our economy as well!

4. Clearing the Air.

Be sure to fix any water leaks in your home immediately. Not only will you be conserving precious water resources, you will avoid humidity that can lead to mold and contaminate your indoor air.

5. Simplify ... Less is More!

The expert green consumer realizes that the best way to "buy green" is to buy less. Living with less is a relatively easy way to simplify your life.

6. Breathe Easy Inside!

Do you have that new paint or carpet smell that lingers for days or weeks? That's because traditional flooring, paints, and stains contain volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, which may be linked to a variety of health problems. Keep your indoor air fresh by choosing low- or no-VOC paints and flooring products.

7. Give the Earth a Hand

If you prefer to hand wash dishes, be water conscious. Fill one side of the sink with warm water and soap and the other with clean water. Dunk your dishes to clean and rinse, rather than leaving the water running.

8. Be a Pooper Scooper

Responsible pet owners not only make our common areas more pleasant, but also contribute to the health of our waterways. Be sure to pick up after Fido and eliminate the waste from reaching our rivers.

9. Sink the Bottled Water

Even though plastic water bottles can be recycled, many of them are not and end up in the landfill. Agree to go bottle free! Buy a filter for your sink and carry water in a reusable container. You will save money and reduce waste.

10. Let it Rain...under your driveway

Choose porous materials like mulch and gravel for driveways, walkways, and porches instead of concrete. These materials allow rain to filter down through the soil, which reduces stormwater runoff and recharges our aquifer.

11. Recycle your Cell!

Studies show that there are over 500 million cell phones in our landfills or in storage facilities awaiting disposal. And the problem escalates by 2 million phones each week! Cell phones contain heavy metals like lead and should never be discarded with regular trash! Fortunately, many cell phones or phone parts can be recycled and put back into use. Used cell phones are accepted for FREE through the St. Lucie County's Household Hazardous Waste Program and may be recycled through other organizations as well.

12. Unplug It!

Some reports indicate that home electronics account for up to 25% of household energy usage, with 60-75% of the energy consumed by these electronics occurring while they are turned off or on stand-by mode. Consider unplugging electronics or turning off the switch to electronics that are powered by remote.

13. Bring your own Bags!

Instead of accepting plastic or paper bags at the store, bring reusable cloth or mesh bags from home. Keep forgetting them? Store them in your car!

14. Tune Up!

Save money and the planet by keeping your vehicle tuned-up. A poorly maintained vehicle can increase fuel consumption by up to 50% and emissions by even more.

15. Give things a second life!

Donate your unwanted clothing, furniture and home renovation materials to thrift stores and the 'Re-store.' Many thrift stores are charitable organizations, so you'll be helping others while completing the 'cycle' in recycle.

16. Compost your yard clippings and kitchen scraps!

You can greatly reduce your curbside trash by composting your yard clippings and kitchen scraps. Whether you use a manufactured bin or just an informal pile in your backyard, a compost pile creates rich, organic fertilizer for your garden and potted plants.

17. Be Water Wise!

Water is a precious commodity in Florida! Challenge yourself to save water by fixing leaks, taking shorter showers, and irrigating your yard sparingly.

18. Use a Solar Clothes Dryer!

The average clothes dryer uses 4500-5000 watts of electricity to operate, making it one of the largest energy guzzlers in your home. Try air drying your sheets and towels outside. They'll never smell fresher!

19. Make It Last!

When your budget allows, buy products that are well built. These products will last longer, saving precious virgin resources and landfill space!

20. Drive Less!

Combine your weekly errands into one trip or make them part of your drive home from work.

21. Buy local!

Buying locally produced food and products reduces the environmental impact of long-distance shipping.

22. Change Your Air Filter Often!

Not only will this improve energy efficiency, you'll create healthier indoor air in your home. 50% of all illness is aggravated or caused by polluted indoor air.

23. Go Native!

Native plants are adapted for Florida and require less water, pesticides and fertilizer.

24. Avoid products with extra packaging!

Cast your green vote by avoiding over-packaged items that create extra waste.

25. Try to Catch the Rain!

Have a rain barrel or cistern to collect rain water for use in your landscaping.

26. Flush less!

Low flow or dual flush toilets can save 800-2000 gallons of water per year. A family of 4 will use 9,125 gallons of water per year just to flush toilets.

27. Take the Trash Challenge!

Challenge the family to see how few bags of trash you put curbside each week! Challenge your neighbors, too! The average household sends 40 pounds of garbage to the landfill every week.

28. Close the "Cycle"!

Buy products that are made from recycled materials. You can buy papers products that are 100% recycled.

29. Give Wildlife a Home!

Replace unused areas of your lawn with native trees, shrubs and plants. Lawns provide very little food or shelter for native animals.

30. Get out of the air freshener craze!

To really clean green, find the source of the odor and eliminate it. Open windows rather than use air fresheners that have been shown to aggravate asthma and allergies. A 2007 study by the Natural Resource Defense Council found that 12 of 14 of the most common household air fresheners include phthalates, which have been linked to health issues. For more information see <http://www.nrdc.org/>.